

Book Review: Alcohol, Drinking, Drunkenness: (Dis)Orderly Spaces

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Mark Jayne, Gill Valentine, Sarah L. Holloway. *Alcohol, Drinking, Drunkenness: (Dis)Orderly Spaces*. Surrey: Ashgate. 2011. 158 pp. ISBN 978-0-7546-7160-2

Reviewed by Alasdair J. M. Forsyth, Scottish Centre for Crime & Justice Research, Glasgow Caledonian University, Glasgow, Scotland. (Word count = 986)

(Dis)Orderly Spaces sets out to be the first book dedicated to looking at alcohol issues through a geographical lens. This aim is particularly refreshing for this reader, who for the past quarter century has felt like the only geographer working in the substance use field in Scotland - and yet from the outset was struck that Amsterdam University's drug research team was based in their department of *Sociale Geografie* (perhaps, unlike the English-speaking world, the Dutch have a more tolerant attitude towards geographers?).

In their Introduction, Jayne, Valentine & Holloway describe geographers as "newcomers" to alcohol research's top-table, but point out that geography has always been present throughout alcohol discourses by other academics and theorists (Gin Lane and the Night-time Economy are spatial concepts). However they note that at present, geographical aspects of drinking are under-theorized and in need of dedicated empirical research investigation.

Thus the book is very timely, being written at a point when even adherents of the medical model of 'alcoholism' are becoming aware that drinking contexts (be these micro-settings or globalizing drinking cultures) are as crucial to alcohol outcomes as are fixed genetics or ethanol consumption levels by body-mass-index calculations. Amidst this emergent interdisciplinary spirit, 'newcomers' can be seen as having much new to offer, and it was most welcome that throughout this book these authors stress that geographers are not so immersed (as say other social scientists) in the dominant 'problem paradigm' (moral model) which automatically pathologizes drinking (and other drug use), limiting research agendas to the ghettos of health and deviance (and where dissenting voices are routinely scrutinised for

potential links to the 'drinks industry'). Geographers, it is suggested (p.122), can bridge the "ontological and epistemological impasse" between academia and real world drinkers.

This theme is apparent from the outset in the substantive chapters, where alcohol use is examined in terms such as conviviality, pleasure and social (without the prefix anti!). The drinking behaviours/patterns examined in the first three chapters, whether found in the city, the countryside or the home, respectively, are those which comprise the majority of occasions (or individuals), as opposed to a focus only on the problematic minority. This represents an advance from most theorising, about for example the urban Night-time Economy (Chapter 1), and chimes with recent writings concerning illicit drugs in that same nightlife arena (e.g. that of Geoffrey Hunt, who wrote this book's back-cover endorsement).

As well as avoiding the automatic problematization of alcohol, Chapters 2 and 3 deal with neglected drinking settings, specifically rural environments and home consumption, respectively. In doing so they challenge the notion of 'binge drinking' which has come to be associated with the urban Night-time Economy, regardless of the (often greater) level of consumption in these other settings. Similarly, Chapters 4 to 6 analyse drinking amongst demographic groups who have not often been the focus of recent alcohol research, in terms of gender, ethnicity and age cohort respectively. Nevertheless, the current interest groups, arguably over-represented in much recent alcohol discourse (e.g. young troublesome white females), are not ignored either, with the book relating the creation of a youthful feminised Night-time Economy to the drinks industry purposively marketing towards these consumers, often by the manipulation of youth culture (e.g. by shaping or manufacturing 'cool places').

The final substantive chapter (Chapter 7) breaks new ground by looking at alcohol in psychosocial/emotional spaces (and in the role of drinking in the creation of spatial identities). This is done by exploring “intoxicated geographies”, such as the desire to experience certain emotions/feelings (e.g. relaxation or dis-inhibition) in specific contexts (e.g. drinking to mark a special event or alcohol use as a rite-of-passage).

All the above is achieved largely through the use of findings from the authors’ Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF) funded research comparing two contrasting localities in England, namely Stoke and Eden. In some respects this the main limitation of the book, in that as well as being confined to just one country, these two locations might be said to represent stereotypical extremes. Stoke is a socio-economically disadvantaged ethnically diverse conurbation, while Eden is a traditional ethnically homogenous, but socio-economically mixed, rural area (the most sparsely populated in England). Perhaps a chapter dedicated to ‘social class’/socio-economic status would have helped here, and augmented the others examining demographics?

These limitations however raise the reader’s interest in the gaps not covered (perhaps this is the book’s intention?). For example alcohol in an area of (sub)urban affluence (e.g. the Surrey commuter-belt) is not investigated, although the text does refer to such “middle class” areas as having the highest drinking level in England, albeit situated “behind the sitting room curtains” (page 45). It may be that in such (‘genteel’) environments very few alternative activities are provided for young people to engage in locally, even when compared to Eden. Alternatively, another divergent locality might be one characterised by de-industrialised rural poverty (e.g. County Durham’s ex-coal mining villages), one where residents experience the deprivation double-whammy of socio-economic disadvantage plus remoteness (though such

communities are likely to be more normative of village life in Wales or Scotland, as opposed to the Anglo-centric 'rural idyll'). In such physically and culturally isolated communities, fears about youth violence and unsafe drinking contexts may be at least as concerning as in Stoke (highlighted in another recent JRF funded alcohol project's report, by Eadie & colleagues, which included areas of rural poverty and urban affluence).

Of course these gaps actually represent research opportunities for geographers, as do other issues mentioned, but not covered in detail, by this book. These might include the interactions between drinking and (youth) sub-cultural clustering, the spatial patterning of alcohol trading, or licensed music geographies (which arguably segment the Night-time Economy more than alcohol itself). *(Dis)Orderly Spaces* seeks to encourage more geographical research into alcohol issues, and it points-towards future avenues for 'intoxication geographers' to explore. This reviewer looks forward very much to reading more about what they find in due course.